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Building Arts Participation in Rural America

The Montana Story



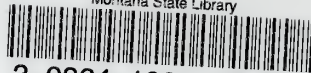
————— Year One: —————
*Learning to Increase Participation
and the Return on Investment*



Montana **Arts** Council

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Learning to Build Audience Participation The Montana Story

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The Building Arts Participation Process

Seven Montana arts organizations were awarded Building Arts Participation (BAP) investments in the summer of 2003. Following on the heels of a nine-month planning program, in which a total of 12 organizations participated, these seven organizations began acting on the plans they set as soon as their investments were awarded. Their experiences prove that any organization in any rural community can see significant increases in audience and support through new practices and focus.

Building Arts Participation (BAP) works in rural Montana. After only six months, it is clear that concerted efforts to build audiences, and deepen participation and commitment pays off. Every one of Montana's seven funded BAP organizations has seen upswings in audience numbers, contributions and annual giving, and in membership and support. Every organization has seen unanticipated newcomers come through their doors. There have been new year-end checks in the mail, and new first-time donors. Each organization has altered the way they operate. The boards have changed and evolved in their thinking. It has not been easy, but the results have been worth the effort.



Montana Shakespeare in the Parks

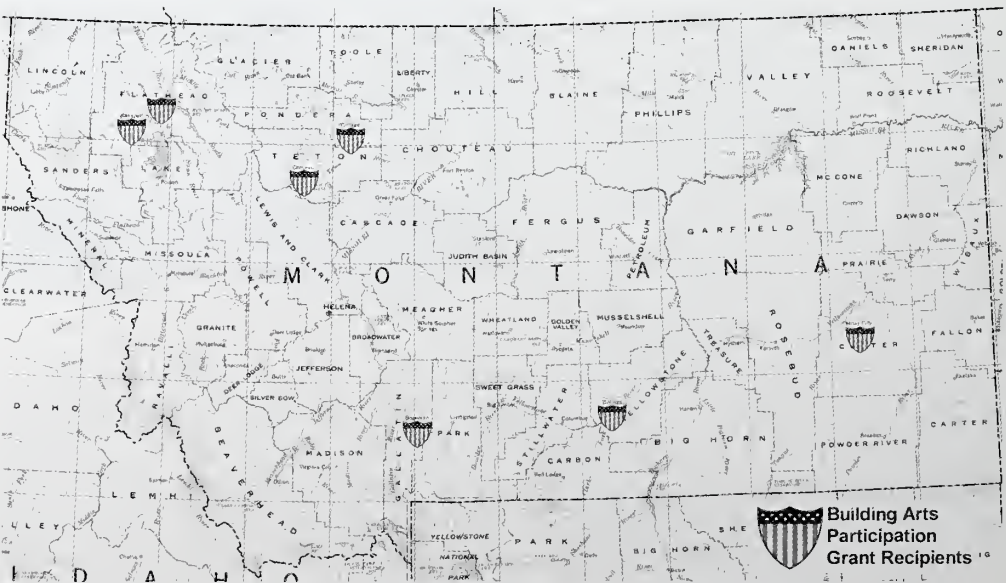
Small towns are not tapped out. In fact, it may be just the opposite, as people who never before acted, attended, or gave contributions have become involved. They included bikers en route to Sturgis, who stopped in at the Custer County Art and Heritage Center for the first time, called their buddies via cell phone and built a word-of-mouth audience. They included 25 people who said they wanted to act, make costumes, and build sets for the Pondera Players. They included people, who before being asked,

put year-end checks in the mail to the Hockaday Museum of Art and to Montana Shakespeare in the Parks. And, they included others who drove 50 miles to Choteau from Great Falls for a Sunday afternoon performance and scores of citizens from Laurel, MT, who began coming to Billings's Alberta Bair Theater for the first time ever.

None of the organizations expected these results within the first six months. But, the results follow practice, planning and dedicated work. They prove that building relationships, listening and responding to community interests, and truly reaching every household in the community with news and invitations pays off. Board members and volunteers, who were skeptical about the investment they had made in planning for this effort, are not so skeptical now. They have seen new partnerships and opportunities open up.

There have been bumps in the road for sure. There have been some organizational changes, some transitions and growing pains - which is not a surprise given the intensity and depth of action invested in focusing every bit of an organization on audience development. But, while new growth has created some conflicts, it opened the door for new strategic planning. Organizational cultures have already changed.

The stories of these seven organizations - along with the stories from the larger group of organizations that received planning investments - form case studies which are documented here. In 2002-2003, twelve arts organizations (out of fifty-seven initial applicants) took the lead in experimenting, researching, analyzing and evolving to increase audiences. Individually and collectively, their work had a profound impact on their communities and on the way arts organizations throughout the state do business even before the



seven finalists were selected to receive multi-year implementation investments. Through this work and the ripple effect it is having statewide, Montana is proving that the arts in rural America are deeply and fundamentally connected to community and civic life.

PARTICIPATION STRATEGY: BROADEN, DEEPEN, DIVERSIFY

Seven Communities, Seven Models for Building Rural Participation

Broaden		
Alberta Bair Theatre	Billings	Building an audience in the neighboring rural town of Laurel through deep and reinforced efforts. BAP Investment \$56,250 Total Project \$168,500
Montana Shakespeare in the Parks	Bozeman	Building local commitment, ownership, and audience in rural towns where it annually tours. BAP Investment \$34,000 Total Project \$198,800
Pondera Players	Conrad	Install seating, invite audience response, build a database, and ask for volunteers to perform and work backstage. BAP Investment \$29,970 Total Project \$91,300
Deepen		
Glacier Orchestra and Chorale	Kalispell	Create "second home" satellites in rural communities throughout the Flathead region. BAP Investment \$37,500 Total Project \$390,200
Performing Arts League	Choteau	Extend every visiting artist stay to include community pre-performance residencies and events and challenge localities to experience artists and art forms that are new to the community. BAP Investment \$34,875 Total Project \$275,060
Diversify		
Custer County Art and Heritage Center	Miles City	Build a local and tourist audience through broader range of exhibits and programs along with billboards and tourism marketing. BAP Investment \$37,148 Total Project \$174,425
Hockaday Museum of Art	Kalispell	Showcase area collectors and their collections, winning new members, attendees and enthusiasm. BAP Investment \$20,257 Total Project \$156,290

This report is an evaluation of the events, discussions and learning that took place through the Building Arts Participation process in Year One. It is the beginning of a continuing, multi-year study of the participant arts organizations and their audiences.

HISTORY: BEFORE BAP

The roots of the Building Arts Participation program began in the mid-90s with what had been the Montana Arts Council's Arts are Central to our Communities program. Arts are Central to our Communities was designed to support pilot projects that firmly anchored existing arts organizations in rural¹ and underserved communities. The program sought to create lasting partnerships between or among arts organizations, their communities, and businesses. The goal was to strengthen and stabilize organizational ability to serve communities.

In communities throughout the state, approximately 30 organizations began working on transforming the way the arts and communities worked together. They started listening, reaching out, partnering and leading community development.

Simultaneously, the Montana Arts Council was formulating its current strategic plan and its vision for the 21st century. Through a statewide assessment of the priorities and needs of its constituents, the council shaped a vision to be "a state and national leader in the arts by focusing its vision outward, not only to strengthen the arts in the state, but also help boost Montana's economy, stimulate quality of life, and improve education throughout the state." Keeping in mind this outward vision, MAC's mission statement places its focus on all Montanans, through programs that "benefit Montanans of all ages and cultures as current or future creators, participants, or patrons of the arts."

WALLACE FOUNDATION INVESTMENT

Based on its mission and building on the Arts are Central to our Communities program, the Montana Arts Council submitted a proposal to the Wallace Foundation in 2001, and was subsequently awarded a multi-year investment of \$500,000, of which \$300,000 was re-granted. Montana is one of only 13 states selected to participate in the foundation's highly competitive State Arts

¹ Rural is defined as communities with a population of less than 50,000. Only three Montana cities are larger than this: Billings, Missoula and Great Falls. Statistically, the Montana population is an average of seven people per square mile.

Partnership for Cultural Participation (START) initiative. The initiative's intent is to "enable state arts agencies to establish and expand program standards and practices that increase participation in, and support for, the arts." As an award winner, the Montana Arts Council had the ability to develop Arts are Central to our Communities into a significant new venture that could give organizations significant funding. Arts are Central to our

THE BAP PROCESS

Letter of Intent

Montana arts organizations were invited to submit concepts for building participation among rural or underserved audiences through one of three pathways - broadening, deepening, or diversifying their audience or public.

Planning Investment Awards

Twelve organizations were selected based on their letters of intent to participate in a nine-month planning process. Each was awarded a planning investment of \$5,000, of which \$1,000 was dedicated to funding work with their coach/consultant.

Planning Process

Planning work had to involve appropriate research and dialogue with the targeted potential audience and link directly to each organization's own mission. The final plan, or prospectus, had to contain all the elements of a business plan.

Prospectus Submission

Eleven of the 12 planning investment recipients submitted prospectus business plans for their intended initiative. Of these, seven organizations were selected to receive multi-year investments.

Annual Evaluation and Planning

Each of the seven organizations must set annual benchmarks and conduct qualitative and quantitative evaluation of their progress.

Sustainable Outcomes

Each organization was encouraged to set realistic annual increased income goals at the outset. Over the two and a half year course of the BAP investment, they must demonstrate the ability to locally earn - through earned or contributed income and in-kind services and materials - increased revenues. Each organization must show that it can sustain this new revenue, annualized, beyond the grant period and without the expectation of further BAP investments.

Communities investments were no larger than \$10,000. The new program, Building Arts Participation, would make possible planning investments of \$5,000, with implementation investments up to \$56,000, furthering multi-year efforts to build audiences while strengthening arts organizations.

THE BASELINE

Montana's arts organizations had already conducted substantial work building audiences as a foundation for the Building Arts Participation program. A statewide telephone survey of 1,000 households, "Montanans and the Arts,"² conducted in October of 2001 found that 60 percent of Montanans participate in the arts. (Subsequently, the 2002 National Endowment for the Arts Public Participation in the Arts survey³ has found that 39.4 percent of Americans participated in the arts in 2002.)

Even given the general national downturn of participation that followed to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Montanans seemed to participate in the arts at a higher rate than Americans as a whole.

The Montanans and the Arts survey found that state residents rank participation in the arts right behind outdoor recreation and church activities as top leisure time priorities, and that more Montanans participate in arts and cultural activities than in sports, volunteer work, civic activities, or school activities. Montanans already are arts inclined.

But Montana arts organizations still need to increase the size of audiences, the frequency of participation, and the depth of commitment audiences have to the arts in their communities. As a highly rural state, Montana has few foundations and mostly small corporations to provide critically needed funding for the arts. There is only one Fortune 500 Company in the state, and it offers limited funding to the arts. The vast majority of businesses in the state employ fewer than 20 people. Sponsorships, provided by many Montana businesses, are in proportion to the size of these businesses.

To be healthy and viable for the long term, Montana arts organizations must place even more effort on audience building. They need to connect to the individual, the small business and the shops on Main Street. They have to be so fundamentally important to their community's way of life that they become the de facto community centers and hubs that are cherished, support-

² Montanans and the Arts Statewide Survey. One-thousand household telephone survey conducted by ArtsMarket, Inc., from September 18 to October 8, 2001.

³ Study of Public Participation in the Arts, 2002, conducted for the National Endowment for the Arts by the U.S. Census Bureau as a supplement to regular household surveys.

ed and meaningful. They have to build relationships, not just participation. Foundation and corporate support specifically for the arts, though generous, is very limited in the state. When it comes down to it, Montana citizens pay the bills for the arts in their communities as individual donors and ticket buyers, and in tight financial times they almost exclusively assume the responsibility for keeping the arts vibrant. For Montana arts organizations, the task is daunting. Winning the involvement and investment of as many Montanans as possible requires a depth of work far beyond programming, a whole new level of dialogue and responsiveness to build community investment and ownership.



Custer County Art and Heritage Center

THE BAP PROGRAM

The Building Arts Participation program is designed to help increase the resources of Montana's nonprofit arts organizations. Resources are defined as audiences, leadership, volunteers and local-area funding (earned, contributed or in-kind) for the arts organization.

Community involvement and ownership is the foundation for the Building Arts Participation programming. Audience development in Montana is not a trend or a funding vogue. Learning what building participation requires, and how to make it truly work and last, is essential to the survival of every arts organization in every community.

To inform learning and to guide every arts organization in the state, the Montana Arts Council invited interested constituents to apply for a two-part program to build audience participation. The first part of the program awarded planning investments of \$5000, of which \$1,000 was allocated to fund facilitators or coaches that were assigned to work with the grantees, leading them through a process of community dialogue and strategic audience development planning. Twelve organizations were selected to participate in this initial stage of the program.⁴ From this pool, seven

⁴ Two additional organizations were awarded smaller investments (\$2,500) but one subsequently had to withdraw from the program. One of the 12 fully funded planning grantees withdrew later in the process (see pages 42-43 for detail).

organizations were subsequently selected to receive implementation investments. All of the participant organizations developed highly competitive, exciting implementation strategies, and all - even those not awarded implementation funding - are moving forward with their plans.

FUNDING APPROACH AND CRITERIA

Building Arts Participation made use of a new process for the Montana Arts Council, a Letter of Intent request for the planning investments, and a full Prospectus for the implementation investments. This approach was designed to stimulate planning skills within the organizations and thus to move participants to a new level of institutional capacity. Within the Letter of Intent, organizations had to select a specific approach they would pursue for building participation - Broaden, Deepen or Diversify. They had to outline a concept they would subsequently develop through the nine-month planning period, assisted by an outside coach. Then, within the Prospectus⁵ itself - essentially their application for the multi-year implementation funds - applicants had to not only detail the implementation plans, but had to specify

how these would stabilize and build capacity to maintain new levels of revenue after the completion of the two and a half year investment program. Without using the often-formidable language of business planning, the Montana Arts Council was asking for business plans and projections. This had a profound impact on the participants and the ripple effect to other arts organizations across the state has, in fact, already begun.



Hockaday Museum of Art

The Montana Arts Council made its goals for the program absolutely clear. "This program will broaden, deepen, and/or diversify participation in Montana non-profit arts organizations. The program will build arts participation and boost local resources for non-profit arts organizations. To be successful, projects must strike a balance and stay true to the artistic mission of the organization while meeting needs of participants. The results of this program *must be increased resources tied to increased revenues, whether they are earned, contributed, or in-kind* (author's emphasis). These resources need to be

⁵ See "What to Include in the Prospectus" guidelines, Footnote Detail, page 50.

from the local area because the greatest potential for stable and steady growth lies in support from the private sector."

Increased resources, not just increased audiences. This goal for the program harkens directly back to the need to build organizational fiscal strength in a state with precious few foundations and major corporate funders. Obviously, the 12 initial participants and the final seven awardees had to go beyond basic projections within their planning; they had to commit to a business approach that would meet the arts council's goals.

This posed a challenge offered by few investment programs in the arts, anywhere. The grantees had to develop business plans documenting a feasible revenue strategy, not just a good-will outreach plan or a one-time audience expansion such as a festival or special season. The plans had to be practical, show solid feasibility, and translate to the bottom line. In the end, this translated into some winning investments and solid business strategies, that will hold up as national models.

In addition to the household telephone survey, the council commissioned parallel research⁶, gathering actual audience and financial data from BAP planning investment recipients and from all non-profit arts organizations in Montana.

The 12 BAP planning investment organizations, combined, had a baseline of:

- Paid admissions of 115,794 (range: 435 - 45,332)
- Free admissions of 96,789 (range: 5 - 34,026)
- Total earned income of \$2.37 million (range: \$14,865 - \$1,044,315)
- Total contributed income of \$1.082 million (range: \$3,000 - \$213,017)
- Total local government income of \$65,287 (range: \$1,000 - \$25,645)
- Total in-kind support valued at \$324,913 (range: \$6,500 - \$97,425)

Applications for the planning investments submitted via Letter of Intent were evaluated based on how clearly they discussed developing strategies to build, deepen, or diversify participation and demonstrated how the projects will provide additional resources. It is important to note that the council includes audience, leadership, volunteers, and in-kind as well as local funding within its definition of additional resources. In a rural area, in-kind support can be far larger than cash. Capital development is often undertaken through contributions of lumber and nails rather than cash, and barter is still a means of exchange.

⁶ Baseline Building Arts Participation Organizational Survey, December, 2002. ArtsMarket, Inc.

Within the Letter of Intent, organizations were asked to determine a planning process, show how they planned to involve targeted participants and partners in their planning, lay the groundwork for long-term, steady and sustainable growth, and show how the projects will continue after the investment period. It is important to note that the guidelines required organizations to go beyond themselves and their own circle of board, volunteers, or members in planning. They had to develop a means to listen and learn from their targeted new audience. This alone was a major step.

As an added dimension, the Montana Arts Council stated in the guidelines, "Montana legislators will help set additional criteria for success that will be incorporated into the final Prospectus." Legislators? Public agencies as a whole tend to steer clear of legislators as decision-makers concerning investments. Yet the Montana Arts Council structured its review process to include legislators right from the start. The council's own participation-building strategic goal was to involve authorizers of the council in the process, gain their understanding and include their perspectives as Montanans. The rationale for this is fundamental to the overall BAP program and is based on the agency Vision Statement: this program - and all non-profit arts organizations in the state - should help boost Montana's economy. By doing so, the council hypothesized that the nonprofit arts industry will grow economically stronger, and become increasingly important to the overall economy of the state. Again, as a part of the baseline, the Montana Arts Council commissioned an economic impact study⁷ so a post-BAP evaluation can discern what, if any, economic growth and progress can be linked directly or indirectly to the program's strategies.

It found:

- A total nonprofit arts industry impact of \$85 million
- 1,949 full time jobs
- \$35.8 million in payroll
- \$13.5 million in tax revenues, with \$4 million of that staying local
- Montana's arts organizations have a greater employment impact than one-quarter of the state's top 100 industries
- It also found that 88 percent of the dollars spent by arts organizations are spent locally, and that the in-kind contributions of volunteer hours are significant: 6,600 volunteers contribute over 200,000 hours to the arts, or the equivalent of \$1.8 million in payroll

⁷ The Role of the Nonprofit Arts in Montana's Economy. May, 2003. ArtsMarket, Inc.

If the BAP program is a success, these numbers will increase beyond the rate of inflation by 2006, after the completion of the implementation projects and the related work to inform the growing skills of all arts organizations in Montana.

THE PANEL REVIEW PROCESS

The recipients of the planning investments and the final seven implementation investments were determined by a panel⁸ comprised of two Montana legislators, peers from nonprofit organizations within the state, and one out of state panelist - the director of another state arts agency involved in the START program. The same panelists reviewed both sets of applications to ensure a consistent approach to evaluating the applicants.

The panelists were asked to consider the applications in the context of the RAND study "A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts."⁹ Specifically, they were asked to consider and rank the degree to which each applicant demonstrated in their plans an integrative approach to participation building, including:

- Linking the organizational participation-building activities to its core values and purpose by choosing participation goals that support that purpose;
- Identifying clear target groups and basing its tactics on good information about those groups;
- Understanding the internal and external resources that can be committed to building participation and,
- Establishing a process for feedback and evaluation.

In evaluating both the planning applicants and the implementation applicants, the panelists were also asked to evaluate the degree to which the mission of each organization was aligned to its participation-building idea; the degree to which proposed additional resources are identifiable; and that the budget and its relationship to each estimated project were appropriate. Applicants from Montana's largest cities (population over 50,000) were required to focus their initiatives directly on rural or underserved participants or partners.

⁸ See listing of panel members, Footnote Detail, page 51.

⁹ For a full copy of the report, see the RAND web site at www.RAND.org

Finally, based on the following, panelists were asked to rank applications as to how strongly each met the criteria of:

1. Involvement of the targeted participants and/or partners to plan, implement, experience and evaluate the participation-building idea.
2. The proposed additional resources seem reasonable and achievable.
3. Feasibility of the participation-building idea to be sustained beyond the investment period, and to provide for future organizational growth.
4. The concept behind the participation-building idea is achievable as a national model for use in other rural communities.

PLANNING GRANTEES

The 12 planning investments went to:

- Custer County Arts and Heritage Center
- Sunburst Community Service Foundation
- Performing Arts League of Choteau
- Montana Repertory Theatre
- Pondera Players
- Glacier Orchestra and Chorale
- Bigfork Community Players
- Montana Shakespeare in the Parks
- Alberta Bair Theater
- Emerson Center for Arts and Culture
- Bozeman Symphony Orchestra
- Hockaday Museum of Art

To launch these organizations on their planning, the Montana Arts Council convened a meeting with staff and board members from each institution, shortly after the planning investments were awarded. The council also invited the team of field coaches who would serve as consultants to the organizations, all selected and matched to the organizations at their request and/or at the arts council's recommendation. A Wallace Foundation program representative traveled to Montana for the meeting to brief the group on the foundation's interests concerning building cultural participation, and on its hopes for this venture. Participants also used the session to begin their dialogues with the coaches to launch their planning processes.

The anticipated projects all had similarities, but represented unique approaches. Some involved outreach programming to rural communities. Some involved building on-stage and behind-the-scenes participation. Some involved strengthening facility capacity to serve the community. Some focused on bringing newcomers in the door.

COACHING

The Montana Arts Council engaged coaches¹⁰ - professional consultants and planning coaches - to work with the applicants. Each was skilled in guiding organizations through planning and organizational assessment, and each was charged in assisting the organizations in a way that was totally flexible and customized. Some maintained consistent phone and e-mail contact with their organizations. Others were called on-site to facilitate planning meetings and solve dilemmas that came up through the process. Others led focus groups and helped in research.

As the coaches learned and later reported, the matchmaking and guidelines for what was to be accomplished could have benefited from increased formality. A few of the applicants were new to planning - some had never done any kind of formal strategic planning, much less intensive audience and business planning. Some had never before worked with a consultant, and were not certain how to make optimal use of a consultant's time. The term "coach" proved to be somewhat confusing to the organizations and consultants alike. Defining in more detail what role consultants can play and what skills they offer in organizational and audience planning, research and implementation counsel would have, in hindsight, helped all parties.



Performing Arts League

Because of this - and likely because of some self-consciousness on the part of the participants - the coaching part of the planning got off to a slow start. A number of the participants wanted to have some planning done to show to their consultants before the coaching began. But within a few months, nearly all the participants

¹⁰ See a listing of the coaches, Footnote Detail, page 51.



Hockaday Museum of Art

were working on their plans. The arts council extended the planning period from three to nine months. The council learned that three months was too short a time period for substantial planning work. By six months into the planning process, the plans were coming together, and the rigor of business planning required by the prospectus was turning up the intensity of the process. One group pulled out of the process when its planning

research demonstrated that a different approach would be necessary: the market didn't yet exist to sustain its projected concept. Another organization significantly changed its original scope and intent. Others tightened their approach.

The sustainability requirement was most challenging for everyone, and especially for the smallest of the applicant organizations. A 20 or 30 percent budget increase on a budget of \$8,000 is hard to sustain in a small, rural, all volunteer organization. Even the largest participant organizations had to carefully project the multiple impacts that might come from their efforts, noting that often the increased resources would come from new contributors who become involved. In some cases, the new revenue would come through partners established through the initiative.

All the groups struggled with the budget requirements of demonstrating capacity to sustain resources at the new, higher level after the end of the investment period. And here is where the participant organizations particularly saw the importance of having coaches: planning, reflecting and evaluating are hard to do alone.

The small operating budgets and entrepreneurial style of Montana's arts organizations, combined with their largely rural and small community settings, has meant until now that, for some, formal strategic planning hasn't been seen as a priority. But through BAP and the coaching process, these organizations became even more skilled at business planning. The prospectuses were solid business plans, raising the bar for the field and demonstrating a new level of organizational competency.

EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION

Each organization was required to identify specific outcomes they expect at the end of the two and a half year implementation cycle. Even in the application Letter of Intent for the planning phase of work, organizations were coached to begin thinking about outcomes and benchmarks and were asked in the prospectus to respond to the following questions:

1. What is the desired outcome of your project?
2. Why this approach to reaching your desired outcome?
3. What current internal and external conditions, needs and opportunities led to your decision to do this?
4. What internal challenges, which may not be directly related to this project, are a part of your baseline condition?
5. What internal organizational impacts or changes do you anticipate as you move forward?
6. What external impacts, if any, do you anticipate in the first year/coming months of this planning project?
7. What do you want your planning process to do for your organization?
8. What do you need to know, what information do you need to gain to move forward with the right plan, the right strategies?
9. What stakeholders do you anticipate involving?
10. What coalitions or partnerships do you anticipate needing to build through the planning process?
11. What are your measures of success for the planning process?
Internal, within your organization; collegial, in building partnerships; community-wide, in building stakeholders and buy-in?

And, there were further questions:

1. What are the internal and external issues, conditions, and opportunities that are a part of your "baseline?"
2. Evaluation measures anticipated progress and unanticipated outcomes toward reaching the goals you set. Are your goals clear and focused so that you can measure progress and outcomes?
3. Is the logic path right? Begin with the end in mind as you plan.
4. Are you setting the right scale of goals and anticipated outcomes or benchmarks? Many a plan suffers from being too ambitious. Small successes can be golden, and lead to bigger successes down the road.

5. Do the strategies make sense? Are they doable and measurable?
6. What equals success to you and everyone in your organization?
7. Can your organization focus on the priorities, or are there other things that become static, diffusing your energy and potentially impacting your outcomes?
8. How can everyone who is a stakeholder in your plan become a stakeholder in the benchmarks?
9. How can you use the annual review process or benchmarking as a way of focusing, prioritizing, adjusting, adapting, and moving forward?
10. Are you measuring the right things?

And finally, the seven organizations that received implementation investments were required, within their prospectus, to identify how they would each document and measure their progress, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Each was encouraged to develop an evaluation plan of the appropriate scope and complexity for their organization. Annually, the seven organizations will be submitting the documentation they gathered during the year to demonstrate their progress, and they will do so again at the end of the implementation phase. Below are the questions each organization is required to respond to each year:

1. What progress have you made to date toward each of your objectives?
2. What challenges or obstacles have you encountered, and how have they affected your progress?
3. What lessons have you learned along the way?
4. Have there been any unintended outcomes as a result of the work to date?
5. What effect has this had on your organization?
6. In what ways will you work differently in the future? Consider your organizational structure, board leadership, constituents, community and funders.

Case Studies – Stories of Change

The stories of change, responding to the evaluation questions posed before, show that even with solid business planning there are unanticipated outcomes and a few bumps in the road. Each story evolves with every new production and event, and tracks how participation builds - and impacts organizations - in these seven Montana towns.

THE PERFORMING ARTS LEAGUE - DEEPEN

■ THE CHALLENGE: *Connecting the artists to the community.*

Choteau, with a population of 1,741, is the county seat of Teton County, situated about twenty miles east of the Rocky Mountains in a region referred to as the Rocky Mountain

Front. The county elementary school (K-8) has 350 students, and the high school has 162 students. This is ranch land - wheat, barley and livestock. One of its long time farmer/ranchers happens to be deeply involved with the Choteau Performing Arts League, the only arts/presenting organization in the county.

Ralph Paulus is, by his definition, "a board member of the Choteau Performing Arts League who combines his talents for growing things - as an area farmer - with his musical background to bring about unique and varied programs for the Choteau area. Being 'Older Than Dirt' has allowed him to grow with the performing arts efforts and engage many local folks in his enthusiasm for bringing the talents of lots of exceptional performers to the Choteau area."

By the time the league had successfully applied to the BAP program, Ralph had tried many audience development approaches. As Paulus reported early

RETURN ON INVESTMENT year one
 75% increase in at-the-door ticket sales
 5% increase in series ticket sales

in the planning process, "we've tried to go outside of our audience, and we studied the lists of people who weren't going. We did the great ticket giveaway. We've done the phone follow-up calls saying it's time to buy a ticket. And for season tickets, the response was always no. People aren't interested in committing to four or five shows. Our prices are so cheap - \$25 for five shows - that they can't use the money excuse. Heck, they'll say they can't come because they have to go buy shoelaces in Great Falls. Any old reason will do."

The Performing Arts League audience was static. It seemed that no matter what, the same loyal hundred or so people came, but no one new joined their ranks. The audience was elderly, and getting smaller by the year.



Performing Arts League

"Our core audience is widows," Paulus explained at the start of the planning process. "So we do our programs at two o'clock on Sunday afternoons. They go to church, go for lunch, come to the concert, get their groceries and go home. But that doesn't work for the younger audience that we want to get. They are out skiing. But does that segment of our community participate in anything?"

Sometimes it seems you could pay them and they wouldn't come. You know, 'Bowling Alone,' the book, is where I live. We're trying to go from Bowling Alone to Singing Together."

Selling series tickets was hard, and got harder by the year. "The series tickets, we used to do the old Danny Newman way - Subscribe Now!" Paulus explained. "Over the years, that evolved into you have to sell the heck out of every show."

Prior to the BAP initiative, the league began experimenting with community-school residencies in advance of every performance, to build enthusiasm and interest that would attract newcomers to the performances. "We learned that as we expand the residencies, it expands the last-minute single ticket buyers," Paulus said. "We saw that if there is a personal contact with the artist during the week, the odds are that people will show up at the show. So we decided that we are going to look for many places to put the artists."

The league had also begun experimenting with getting people to participate in the art forms that were being presented. They started a drumming group, and then got people to show up to drumming concerts. Similarly, they re-energized a local piano group because they had a piano recital scheduled on their series, and a group of amateur violinists organized around a violin concert.

The Performing Arts League board members know well that in a town as small as Choteau, word of mouth and one-on-one marketing is essential, and so they began their planning process by listening to their community. "We started the planning by doing some focus groups with our educators, our ticket sellers, the drumming group, the violin group, the piano teachers - all those little circles," said Paulus.

By month two of the planning process, the Performing Arts League board had met with their coach, John Barsness, and had also enlisted the aid of some local business coaches. They had used one of the visiting artists to start testing new models. And they had read: Paulus had just completed "The Tipping Point," one of the many books provided to each of the seven participants by the Montana Arts Council,¹¹ and was thinking about how new behavior patterns tip and become established. "When we wrote the letter of intent, we hadn't read those books. I began thinking about how you could get a whole school excited about coming to a concert. So we started deepening the residency idea, and deepening it for the artist, too, by the way. We had the artists do workshops for all the kids in different settings. We had dancers work with the cheerleaders and a hip-hop workshop. And, then we thought why not add a swing workshop. Surprise: most of the high school kids came. And, then - even better - the kids came to the concert on Sunday. One of the girls said, "It was the best weekend I had since I've been in high school."

"It was interesting; we saw those kids getting to have fun. No behavior modification, just plain fun. So we are thinking we need to put our effort into things that work like that. Maybe we will have Savoy-Doucet come and we will do a Cajun food weekend. Work the violin group. Do a whole Cajun weekend. Forget the newspaper advertising approach to audiences. Let's cook instead!"

Cook, indeed. The league received an implementation investment of nearly \$35,000 and booked its Cajun weekend with Savoy-Doucet. Michael Doucet's concert launched the fall 2003 series, and the league cooked up a Cajun potluck to celebrate. The league invited some new residents - who happened to hail from Louisiana - to be their guests, and the family responded by

¹¹ See a list of publications made available for reading, Footnote Detail, page 53.

buying a series ticket. One of the league members also made a Cajun music CD and took it to all the classrooms. Students turned up. And, the celebration of all things Cajun in a Rocky Mountain Front town made it onto the front page of the "Out and About" section of the Great Falls Tribune. People drove over from Great Falls. There were newcomers in the hall that Sunday afternoon that no one knew.

Next, the league booked mime Bill Bowers, and asked him to come to town early to not only work with students in the school, but to lend a hand coaching all the kids in the local community theatre production of *Oliver*. It cost a little more in artist fees and meant sharing their artist with another arts organization, but it resulted in an audience of over 200 - twice the usual number. Paulus tells how the word of the extended residencies spread. "A number of us took Bill Bowers to the Buck Horn Bar for dinner. This crusty old rancher comes over in his Carhartts, and told everyone that he likes what we were doing in the schools and what Bowers was doing for the kids, and bought the whole table dinner. That's not a \$10,000 investment from a foundation, but it is support from someone in town who has no reason to support the league other than his interest."

But all has not been smooth sailing, despite these victories. By choosing programming that makes the front page in Great Falls and gets kids to come to Sunday matinee performances, the league lost some of its long time board members and friends. Old time league members wanted the same types of programming they had always had, audience or not. "Even writing the prospectus wasn't a smooth, joyous process. There was a lot of rumbling underneath." Paulus reported.

After getting the investment there was a split on the board. One camp of board members just wanted to host a big summer event. The other camp wanted to keep doing stimulating programming to get different people from the community involved. A few board members quit when the group decided to go forward with new programming, including a visit by the company Liz Lehrman and Dancers.

The influx of new money and the responsibility it brought to the organization to concentrate on audience development also brought conflict. One board member felt strongly that the league shouldn't have a paid staff person, though the investment request factored into the mix paying someone to assist in audience development. Others who have stayed on the board are trying to get the programming back to what they consider comfortable.

Unusual? Not in a small town. "Change in rural America is always hard," Paulus said, "and some people don't want a new audience. It isn't unusual for

people to think that something like this is only supposed to be for them and the audience they have always known."

The league board is now grappling with the impact of success. They have continued working with their coach to help them become less reactionary and more structured in making decisions about programming. Many are attending the Montana Arts Council's 2004 Leadership Institute to build leadership skills. They know now that the programming decisions they have made are more than a tipping point for the community: they are a tipping point determining their own organization's future.

ALBERTA BAIR THEATER - *BROADEN*

■ **THE CHALLENGE:** *Rurals and urbans, side by side at the table.*

The Alberta Bair Theater in Billings is the largest institution to participate in the BAP program, and the only organization in the program headquartered in Montana's largest city. Founded 17 years ago, the ABT has a solid Billings audience, and attracts arts fans from around the state to its presenting series of top quality touring artists and shows.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT year one

32% increase in Laurel contributors
100% increase in Laurel corporate contributors

Billings is surrounded by a number of small towns that, while in geographic proximity to Billings, are culturally totally separated from its urban life. A total of 12, 341 people live in seven communities within an hour's drive from Billings, including Laurel, Columbus, Fromberg, Joliet, Park City, Red Lodge, and Roberts. Laurel, 14 miles west of Billings, is itself the hub for people from the other towns. They are more likely to head to Laurel's IGA for groceries than into Billings. They pick up the more rurally oriented Laurel Outlook to read rather than the *Billings Gazette*. The key, then, to reaching and winning these rural residents as ABT attendees is to win the town of Laurel as a major partner.

"It was an interesting starting point," said Kathleen Benoit, development director at the Alberta Bair. "We are the largest performing arts center in a 500 mile region, but we had not done any targeted research or marketing to a community to find out what they want. We decided we needed to set up a model in Laurel, test it, and then duplicate it in Sheridan, Red Lodge, Absorkee, and others. We want to formalize what works." With a BAP

investment of nearly \$56,000, the ABT set out to create a replicable model for small town audience development.

The ABT began - even before the planning process - by becoming formal partners with the Laurel School District. This partnership allows every student in the Laurel's four K-12 schools to come to the theater twice a year. These students - a total of approximately 1,700 coming from Laurel and the surrounding rural areas - also benefit from multiple ABT residencies prior to each show. Knowing that parents pay attention to their children's priorities, ABT committed itself to a deep and lasting presence, including residency-



Alberta Bair Theater

related performances open to the community.

Shortly after receiving the BAP planning investment, the theater asked its coach, Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer, to conduct a series of community focus groups to learn how to build upon this new school-based presence and turn it into a community-wide initiative that would result in adults coming to the ABT.

"The focus groups reinforced to us that the point of entry in building visibility is that people find out about things through the schools," said Benoit. "We learned that in small towns people don't pick up all their news from the paper. The best communication is word of mouth."

Focus group members also brought up many of the barriers they see to attending a performance in downtown Billings. Not surprising for rural residents in a state where snow can close a highway in a half hour, they noted that they don't want to buy a ticket in advance only to have to fight the weather and perhaps not be able to attend at the last minute. Many who only drive back roads in the country were concerned about parking in Billings and facing the traffic to get to the theater. "It's true," Benoit said. "When you live in a small rural town driving into Billings is driving in to a big city. So we saw we had to do a lot to remove the intimidation factors."

Laurel residents also said they want a Laurel ticket outlet - a local place where they could stop by and pick up tickets. They also mentioned that they'd be

more likely to go to Billings in a group than individually. This led the ABT to shape a package of blocks of modestly priced tickets, with bus service to and from Laurel.

Once into the actual implementation, the ABT staff quickly realized that building and sustaining the Laurel audience required continuous time and effort. "We are learning about rural marketing as we go through this," Benoit noted. "We are learning how to think like a small community. Marketing here requires a lot of word of mouth. Regular lunch at the Laurel Rotary. Talking with the Mayor. Being a local presence. We drop stacks of brochures at the IGA, and have started doing direct mail to every single Laurel household, plus distributing brochures when we have ABT artists do showcases at the school." The ABT built a new corporate partner with the Laurel Outlook newspaper, and has worked with the IGA to set up a permanent ticket sales outlet at the store: ABT will train store personnel to use the computerized ticketing system that was paid for in part by the BAP investment funding.

The return on investment has already started. The 45-passenger bus for the first ABT "Laurel Night" was full. Laurel residents have started showing up at other ABT events. The bus for the next of the four scheduled Laurel Night events is nearly fully reserved. Individual contributions have begun to come in as well.

GLACIER ORCHESTRA AND CHORALE - DEEPEN

■ **THE CHALLENGE:** *Becoming an established regional organization in a region the size of West Virginia.*

The Glacier Symphony and Chorale is headquartered in Kalispell, but serves a region that sprawls from the Canadian border and Glacier National Park " is the fourth most populated county in Montana, but the population is spread between small towns, isolated ranches, resort areas, and the primary communities of Kalispell, Bigfork, Polson, Whitefish, Columbia Falls, Libby and Eureka. The area is geographically so vast and remote that residents of Libby - 89 miles away - might make it into Kalispell a few times a year rather than a few times a week. Would they subscribe to the symphony? A few do, but given the distance and unpredictability of weather, many other likely attendees stay home.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT year one

22 new individual contributors from Libby
and Bigfork -
10% increase

Historically, the Glacier Symphony and Chorale has sent ensembles into towns such as Polson and Libby to do outreach concerts and school programs. On occasion, the full symphony has done concerts throughout the area. But a regular community presence by the symphony has not been possible - until now.

The symphony applied to the BAP program with the idea of building local support teams in a number of these communities - support teams that would make the symphony "local" in their towns. This would make it possible for



Glacier Symphony and Chorale

the symphony to have a regular schedule of performances outside of Kalispell, plus build loyalty and interest among people who had never really been able to be regularly involved with the organization. The \$37,500 BAP investment will support the organization's long-term goal to build a regional support base that will expand the contributor base as well as the audience base. The

symphony is one of the lead organizations in the region working toward the development of a new performing arts center, and it knows that to make a large venue viable, it must have a larger and ever-expanding audience and financial base.

According to former Executive Director Robin Bailey, the symphony decided to hold a series of town meetings during its planning process. In speaking with their coach, Pam Mavrolas, they decided to enter the meetings without any preconceived idea of what they might or might not offer each town. "Pam thought we should go into the town meetings with a blank piece of paper. So we said we weren't there to raise expectations, but that we might be able to offer a smorgasbord of options." Two communities emerged as "second home" sites - Bigfork and Libby.

Bigfork has seen a significant influx of new residents, primarily second-home owners and retirees gathered in the resort area around Flathead Lake. Libby, on the other hand, has been plagued with issues of mine clean-up problems and a dwindling population. Each community in its own way is important to the future of the symphony. While downtown Bigfork is only about 20

minutes away from downtown Kalispell, the Bigfork zip code reaches out to an area of winding and challenging roads along the side of mountain lakes: residents from this area wouldn't be likely to take the extra time to drive into Kalispell, but do come to Bigfork.

Some Libby residents (90 miles to the northwest in the heart of the Kootenai National Forest) do come to Kalispell for concerts, but the sense of geographic isolation is huge. Like Bigfork, it serves as a hub to residents from Troy, Eureka and the mountainous area along the Idaho border. A regular presence in Libby truly meets the symphony's mission of serving the entire northwest area of Montana.

Both town meetings had a healthy turnout of volunteers ready to bring the symphony to their community. One of the reasons for the great turn out for each town meeting was that, according to Bailey, "Local volunteers did the recruiting and asking. The invitation didn't come from us." Each town wanted something unique and important to their own community, and each also wanted to ensure that the symphony provided educational opportunities in their schools. Libby has created an auditorium adjacent to their school, and wants the symphony to be there, "in residence." Bigfork residents wanted a summer outdoor pops concert, to bring their community together. Each got what they wanted. In exchange, each agreed to build a community team of volunteers who sell the tickets and manage the event.

The Libby experience, in particular, has been an early success. According to the symphony's BAP project manager Sherry Parmater, the Libby experience marked the first time the symphony traveled together in a bus, building a team spirit among the musicians. They arrived in Libby to a sold out crowd (audience 475 in a community of 2,600). "Everyone was all dressed up. This was a big deal. They had a champagne reception before the concert. Everyone was so proud," she noted. In fact, the Lincoln County Community Foundation, headquartered in Libby, has already seized upon the symphony's



Glacier Symphony and Choral

annual residence to market it as an asset to the local community as it works to attract new business and residents. "They are using the symphony to talk about the rich cultural climate in Libby," said Bailey. "A video of the concert will be included in a promotion of Libby, as the Chamber and economic development people are starting to think about how cultural activities can help them sell their communities and region."

According to Parmater, plans are solid for Libby to be an annual event for the symphony. In addition to the full symphony concert, musicians are providing master classes and ensemble performances throughout the year. There will also be an annual "Libby Night" at the symphony in Kalispell, including a hotel package they are working to put together.

Success is evident in other ways. One of the symphony's goals in this initiative was to broaden the geographic range of its supporters, volunteers and board members. "We already have added two people from Bigfork on the board," Parmater commented. "That was a goal. We are also pretty close to reaching our goal in new contributions, particularly from the Bigfork area."

The symphony management transitioned in the first year of the implementation, and an interim executive director took on the job after Bailey retired. This has placed particular responsibility on the board, Parmater says. "Our chair and vice chair are completely involved in making audience development a top priority. A board committee has been set up to monitor this process, and to make sure things don't slip through the cracks."

CUSTER COUNTY ART AND HERITAGE CENTER - DIVERSIFY

■ **THE CHALLENGE:** *Something for everyone through heritage and contemporary art.*

The Custer County Art and Heritage Center, located in Miles City, serves some of the remotest lands in Montana, with less than one person per square mile population. "We

have to diversify our audience to build it," said Director Mark Browning early in the center's BAP planning process. There simply aren't enough regular arts attendees to come back over and over to maintain and support the arts center. Ranches sprawl for miles on end. Trips to town are rare. The population is aging and decreasing. "When we say we will aim for growth, we are talking

RETURN ON INVESTMENT year one

39% increase in gallery attendance

10% increase in membership sales

handfuls of people at a time," Browning noted. Annual attendance before starting the BAP project is about 10,000 a year, with an additional 7,500 being reached primarily through educational outreach throughout the huge geographic region served by Miles City.

Local pride runs deep in Miles City. Local support has built the Custer County Art and Heritage Center over time to the point where it has been able to create and sustain a \$10,000 art purchase fund. Strategic planning work done by the board and Browning prior to and through the BAP planning process focused on how to diversify the center's audience. The result: include heritage along with contemporary art. "Contemporary art remains our love and passion. But realistically, we need to tap into the depth of loyalty people here have to local history, and link it to the contemporary art that is our love and passion. We care about contemporary art, but there is a whole population out there that could care less. We have to find a way to hook them in. So we need to look at adding history to what we do, and finding ways to make our contemporary shows have more context. We need a hook to bring in the larger audience. And as we talked throughout the area, there is tremendous interest in heritage. Not to objects, but to images," said Browning.

With this in mind, Browning and his board did a series of interviews. "In a small town, a diverse fifteen-member board in itself represents a broad viewpoint of constituents," he reported. They honed plans already underway before the BAP project, to build exhibits around local painters and photographers linked to history. "We will come up through the early photographers, the painters, and then the transition to the early modernists. We will test the water for popularity and use this to leverage expansion of our building."



Custer County Art and Heritage Center

The center was already in ownership of several hundred historic area photographs from the 1800s, particularly by famed photographer Evelyn Cameron. "There has never been a public collection exhibited here related to the history of Miles City. There is so much in the early photographic history of this region," said Browning. So the board decided to include within this plan a new focus on historic Miles City photographs. And, the board determined to showcase the heritage and historical collections in a new gallery they would build, both to house the collection-based exhibitions and to attract tourists. The emphasis on history paid off: a \$50,000 gift from a private donor came in to make the exhibition space possible. "We will have the ability to attract tourists off of I-94," said Browning.

While engaged in raising funds for and building the new gallery and exhibitions, Browning and his board decided to embark on a simultaneous approach of doing exhibitions that would be broadly appealing - far more so than their typical contemporary art exhibits. The exhibit "Driven" was the first of their initiatives (funded by the \$37,100 BAP investment) to meet this goal, and it included historic autos and ten classic motorcycles. It was timed perfectly to coincide with the annual Sturgis motorcycle gathering. "We had bikers coming in. We had more guys in black T-shirts than would ever come into a contemporary art gallery. We had local guys, too," said Browning. "And you'd see these guys leave, stand outside and call their buddies on their cell phones. And more and more would come. Talk about word of mouth marketing. It was exciting and rewarding."

The center has used part of its BAP investment to build regional marketing. "Few people are picking up and moving to Miles City to take a job," Browning notes, "so we have to go out and serve almost a 100-mile radius, and we have to get smart on marketing to the people from the region who are driving through here." The center's plan includes both billboards and extensive new marketing in various publications. It applied for and won a cultural signage clearance from the Montana Department of Transportation to inform drivers from all directions how to get to the museum. Browning established a partnership with the Miles City Range Riders Museum, and together, the two museums have begun a process of putting up six billboards, each 300 feet square, directing visitors from all directions to their organizations and into downtown Miles City. "The highway department loves it," Browning said. "We split the cost of the signage, so we each have the ability to have more sign space. It has the ability to attract the eye and the exit number." With two I-94 signs completed, the center and museum will move forward next year with signs along the secondary highways running north and south.

Through both efforts, the center has seen an increase in both membership and contributions. "To grow membership in an area that keeps losing population

is hard, but it is membership we need to grow. We are looking at a much longer-range impact than during the investment period. This is repositioning for the long term."

HOCKADAY - DIVERSIFY

■ **THE CHALLENGE:** *Proving the relevance of membership participation.*

The Hockaday Museum of Art resides within the 100-year-old Carnegie Library building in downtown Kalispell. The museum has been there for 35 years, with a loyal and largely local following.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT year one

200 new members since 2002

37% increase

Contemporary art has been the focus, along with regional artists' work. But even featuring regional artists hasn't been enough to attract a new and larger audience. Linda Engh-Grady, the Director, began assessing the problems long



Hockaday Museum of Art

before the BAP planning process started. When Grady arrived as the museum's director less than two years prior to the start of the BAP process, the museum had 180 members. She knew firsthand that there were many art lovers and collectors in Kalispell and the Flathead area, but, as she said, "we couldn't get them in the door. They wouldn't give us the time of day."

The Flathead area is a growing year-round and second home location for extremely affluent individuals, many of whom have museum-caliber art collections. Despite the Hockaday's efforts to win their attention, few ever came in the door.

The timing of the BAP planning investment was fortunate, coming as Grady and her board were contemplating these issues. The board was ready to undertake strategic planning, and linked the BAP planning process to the larger process. An advisory board was also formed, and got involved in the process. "We decided that we needed to diversify our audience," she noted early in the process. "We need to get beyond the core group of Hockaday



Hockaday Museum of Art

exhibit, and we ended up with about twelve ideas. It was too grandiose. So we scaled it back to four exhibits we would like to do. We have taken a hard look at what is successful," Grady said. In the research process, the Hockaday board and staff met with nine key art collectors in the area. They researched other Montana museums about membership and board development, as well. Out of the planning, the "Flathead Collects" theme emerged. Shortly after receiving their \$20,250 BAP investment, the museum launched the first of the four exhibits; Flathead Collects: American Paintings.

People came. Attendance was at its peak, and most significantly, according to Grady, "membership has risen significantly, and people feel they have more to do with the exhibits. The exhibits speak to them. They have given a painting to be in it, and they are excited about it. And those that aren't the collectors, they know that someone locally had collected this major work. So it is more meaningful, which helps people really take it in."

Diversifying the audience was the Hockaday's initial goal, and their target audience (comprised of three groups: newcomers to Montana who have moved to the Flathead; long-time residents of the area who had quit attending because they lacked the relationship with the museum, and already interested art collectors) has started to come. "These were people who didn't come because the museum was not giving them what they found meaningful or relevant," said Grady. "Our audience development work addresses much more than just content of the exhibits. We found that the target audiences' participation, such as lending us artwork or helping to curate exhibits, made the museum much more meaningful to them."

members, and get a much larger segment of the community involved and attending."

The board decided to build upon the concept of an exhibit the museum presented just before the BAP program. Titled "Call of the Mountains," the exhibit borrowed works from private collections from throughout the region, work that was of outstanding artistic caliber. "Work that we otherwise would not be able to present." The appeal was powerful.

"We started coming up with ideas based on the Call of the Mountain

The approach the museum has taken might not be what other museums would do, Grady mused. "People at the national museum meetings would say this isn't the way you should do things. You shouldn't showcase local collections. I don't believe, though, that we should dictate to our public. We should give them what they want because in the end they are the owners of the museum."

Membership at the Hockaday has increased from the 180 baseline to over 500. "Membership is what this is about. And then it translates into more people wanting to be on the board," Grady said. "People are asking to be on the board rather than us asking them. When people ask to be on a board they are very willing to work and help. So we have begun to build a hard working board with a strong sense of ownership. We are now building both an advisory and auxiliary board."

Contributions are up as well. Two years ago, annual fund contributions were hovering around \$3,000. At the end of 2003, the annual fund donations were tallying up at \$8,000. "We didn't send out a gorgeous brochure. Contributions came in with checks from \$250 to \$1,000. We can now use the annual fund as an indicator of how well we are doing."

PONDERA PLAYERS - BROADEN

■ **THE CHALLENGE:** *Training the audience to tell you what they think. (Or, it's not just about the seating.)*

The Pondera Players in Conrad has the smallest operating budget of any of the BAP participants, at \$2,155 for 2002. It is a community theatre that has for decades produced musicals, dinner theatre, and drama. Conrad itself is a community of 2,100, with a large surrounding Hutterite community. People here volunteer, and chip in to make things happen. People take costumes home to sew and build sets in their home workshops.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT year one

63% new workshop participants

17% new volunteers

standing room only for spring show

Pondera Players' biggest problem was that their group of volunteers was not growing: every year there has been an average of 15 performers and 25 crew and support volunteers. With this group, they have been able to produce two plays per year, year after year. But they have been almost a fixture in town and as a result it has been hard to lure newcomers.

During the BAP planning process, the volunteers and board of the Pondera Players made extensive use of the Audience Development Diagnostic tool¹² distributed by the Montana Arts Council. By working through the diagnostic process, the group settled on two simultaneous strategies. One was basic but profound: they needed seats that would enable people to be comfortable and see the stage. The other would require more of a process: recruit new enthusiasts who want to act and work back stage.

The Pondera Players facility - the community hall - had the typical multi-function room flat floor. Benches and folding chairs were the norm, making it uncomfortable and hard to see the stage. As the players spoke with people throughout the community, the request for decent seating became the top priority. So, the first priority of the Pondera Players' BAP implementation venture



Pondera Players

was to purchase portable stadium seating with the BAP investment of nearly \$30,000. "The response," according to Phyllis Phillips, the group's project coordinator and frequent production director and choreographer, "has been overwhelming. For the first play of the season - not a musical, and not a dinner theatre production, we had 114 in the audience - normally we

would have 40 or 50. We surveyed the audience, as we had planned, and found that 20 percent were first time attendees." That audience included visitors from out of state from as far away as Minnesota. "Maybe they were in town for hunting, or friends brought them. They came!" Phillips said.

In all, some 315 people came to the first production, and of those, almost half filled out audience surveys. The surveys formed the starting point of the second of the Pondera Players' strategies: getting newcomers back stage. After all the cards were tallied, some 25 people said they wanted to start getting involved either on stage or behind the scenes. Those 25 plus the community at large have been invited to an introductory workshop put on by the players, to train newcomers, and 18 newcomers have already signed on - proportionately a huge increase to the core group. "We will have concurrent

¹² Developed by ArtsMarket, Inc.

sessions on costumes, makeup, acting, stage direction, musical voice, musical performance, technical lighting and set construction," Phillips said.

Surveying the audience also launched the players into their first audience tracking and database development, something they had never done in the past. A volunteer has entered contact information into a database program, and they have gradually started adding information of other past attendees. Soon, the players will be able to start using direct mail to announce upcoming production opportunities and to sell tickets. This part is the long, slow process of building a larger audience. "It took me a while to get the board to understand that this wasn't just about the seating," said Phillips. "There was so much enthusiasm when we got the seats - we had a reception and a lot of festivities - that it was hard for a while to remember that we have more to do. But they are understanding it now."

SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARKS - *BROADEN*

■ **THE CHALLENGE:** *Learning to be a touring company that can still grow roots in many communities.*

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks has logged somewhere near a half million miles since it was founded in 1973. Headquartered at Montana State University in Bozeman, the company spends eight weeks each summer on the road giving approximately 70 performances throughout Montana, in northern Wyoming and eastern Idaho.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT year one

50% of touring locales saw increased audiences (36% overall, reflecting an increased range of 16% to 100%)
237% increase from 2002 to 2003 in Donation Box receipts

The company has long relied upon local community coordinators, who marshal their volunteers to present the company. Over the years, the process of working with the coordinators had fallen into a set pattern, what Community Relations Director Kathy Jahnke refers to as the "this is the way we do things" syndrome. Both Shakespeare in the Parks' staff and the regional coordinators had set patterns of doing things.

But as a part of celebrating its 30th anniversary season, the organization wanted to create new, stronger bonds with each community. Audiences had leveled off. Artistic director Joel Jahnke explained "audience development was never a priority for me. Because our events were free and we don't sell



Montana Shakespeare in the Parks

tickets, it never made a difference to me if we played to 210 or 300 people. My priorities were elsewhere."

But after taking a serious look at the plateaued audience, Jahnke decided to make audience development his priority. He wanted to maximize the company's audience in each town, and that meant looking to the local coordinators to strengthen and advance marketing. As Jahnke explained,

"Some of the tour coordinators are more motivated than others. Some are volunteers, some are members of a committee, some are employees of a Chamber of Commerce and arranging for our visit is part of their job. We need to know what makes a successful visit and make sure all our coordinators are able to be equally successful."

When Shakespeare in the Parks received its BAP planning investment, the organization decided to build its network of tour coordinators, through one-on-one meetings. The company had tried using the internet to link people together and ensure advance planning, but it was, according to Jahnke, "a dismal failure. We tried a chat room, thinking it would be the perfect solution. We kept emailing everyone. We tried regional meetings and couldn't get enough people to attend them to make them work."

In the end, Jahnke decided it was time to go to each community. He used part of a sabbatical semester to travel to many of the host sites, which started the process. He and the organization then decided to focus on a few key communities, do extensive one-on-one pre-visit planning, and use those as case studies to build success throughout their entire tour circuit. They began with Lewistown, 162 miles northeast of Bozeman. The plan was to visit with the tour coordinator three times in advance of the tour performance, learn something about the local donors and the community, and help them find ways to build a larger audience.

Kathy Jahnke took on this task. "Our tour coordinator was Over Us by the third visit. The tour coordinator actually felt that we had put too much extra work on her. We didn't, in our minds, add anything especially hard, but her comment was 'I don't know how much more you can expect from these cities and towns.' And, her point is valid. They launched a cowboy poetry festival

up there and took in \$10,000. On the same point, they present us, build a larger audience, and at the end of three years they haven't made anything. So we have to rethink this, how to have our activities work for the communities by being part of something they are already doing. I learned that we are not the biggest deal in all these towns. It isn't that they don't love Shakespeare in the Parks. But they want to spend their time on things they can make money on. So we started talking about keeping track of donations by community, so they could get a discount on their fee."

The organization's staff and advisory board started reflecting on what happened. At first, according to Kathy Jahnke, "the board and staff were disappointed in the Lewistown results. But then, we said 'hooray, someone is honest with us.' We have 50-some tour coordinators. We learned that ownership by the tour coordinators is key. For years, we had the attitude toward them of how could they make things easier for us. But we've learned that we are not the customer - they are. They should tell us what they want. For example, we did a CD that we sent out to everyone, standardizing everything for us - but a number of tour coordinators called and said they couldn't open it. We wanted to do everything for our own time-savings. But it needs to work for them."

The entire staff structure at Shakespeare in the Parks - and the way the staff operate - has changed. The organization had considerable turnover prior to the BAP award - three tour coordinators in five years. These positions have been filled with teams or committees rather than individuals, with great results.



Montana Shakespeare in the Parks

After some internal assessment, the organization realized that the management job needed to be reconfigured away from what was primarily bookkeeping into something that is primarily external - working with the coordinators, the sites, the media and contributors. Bookkeeping is now a part-time contracted job. The new structure has made it possible to focus on building relationships with the host communities. Kathy Jahnke reflected; "This BAP program is really about them. It really has changed the way we think. The difference in our staff has gone from 'we don't do it that way' or 'it

will take forever' to 'let's focus on the tour coordinators' needs.' Now, we have made up an electronic spreadsheet that has every community and what it needs to make the tour there successful. We've customized it all."

In addition to the \$34,000 BAP investment, the BAP program has changed the way the Shakespeare in the Parks' board works. The board is advisory, as the organization is a part of a university. As with many advisory boards, its role has been limited. "For so long, they thought of themselves just as cheerleaders," said Jahnke. "They get together once a year and everything is great. Now we have started asking them for ideas, for solutions. At first, they were somewhat confused - why were we suddenly bringing them problems and asking them to do something different. But they have been coming up with ideas, with good answers - many that have been implemented throughout the year. They are changing into a much more effective group."

The Impact of Planning



Hockaday Museum of Art

Planning changes organizations. Planning that is done wisely and well includes a fair amount of external assessment, SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, and an internal analysis of capacity and needs. As with smaller organizations - and in particular, rural organizations - the Montana arts organizations that applied for BAP planning investments were not formal planners.

Few had ever done a truly in-depth strategic plan. Most had never worked with an outside planning coach.

By awarding \$5,000 planning investments, of which \$1,000 was dedicated to coaching, the Montana Arts Council stimulated organizations to listen, learn and respond with effective strategies - whether or not they received an implementation investment down the road.

Organizations that went through the planning process were learners. They received relevant publications sent by the Montana Arts Council, benefited from counsel from their coaches and conducted community research. The SWOT analysis and external research showed each organization new areas of opportunity and helped build new partnerships and stakeholders.



Performing Arts League

The following stories of planning show how organizations can learn and redirect themselves, even without the benefit of long-term counsel and implementation funds.

BIGFORK COMMUNITY PLAYERS

Steve Weston has been one of the leaders of the Bigfork Community Players for years. He's watched it when it was strong - when community theater itself flourished - and he has watched audiences and volunteer actor ranks dwindle. Through a BAP planning investment, he decided to lead the way to rebuild it. "We've never done anything like this before. In the 80s and the 90s, there was a lot less competition. Now, because there are many more arts groups here, the audience size has greatly reduced. We need to change that."

The players' planning process was largely focused on listening and learning from the community. Weston set a goal of going out to every service club and community organization in the Flathead Valley, to describe the players, ask for input and ideas, and learn about interest in community theater. The results were sobering but valuable and necessary for repositioning the organization. He discovered that "there is a need for far more exposure and footwork on our part than any of us imagined. I've heard that people don't know what we do. We have an identity crisis that we have to change! We have already learned that we have to do more effective PR and advertising."

The players also surveyed its audience and made follow-up telephone calls to many long-time attendees. The organization received well over 200 audience surveys as input to planning. The research process itself was a major undertaking and a challenge to board thinking.

"Right now, I don't think our board has a clue about how hard this is - building the audience," said Weston. "But that is a point of learning, as well. Our board size will have to go up. Our board has to become more aware. They have to become more involved. They will have to get committed and step up to the challenge."

BOZEMAN SYMPHONY

The Bozeman Symphony came to the BAP planning investment with a dream and a sense that the dream could become a reality. It wanted to start a youth orchestra that could serve as a magnet for the best young musicians statewide, not just in Bozeman. As its manager, Jackie Vick, said, "There are so many small schools in rural Montana that don't have orchestra programs, but where there are kids taking lessons. We would like to reach those kids and bring them together."

The symphony decided to use the first part of its planning investment to do statewide polling, to set up the network of communication for the potential orchestra, and to gauge the difficulty of the undertaking. It was solid business planning. "We started with a written survey at the Montana Music Educators Association conference. We got back 129 positive surveys and only eight negative surveys. Thirty music educators said they would be on an advisory committee." Vick and her board were excited and enthusiastic. Working with their coach, they started mapping out how the youth orchestra would work. It wouldn't rehearse in the winter months given the weather issues, but would begin in April and continue through October. It set up a steering committee, and started planning the budget. It won the backing of Montana State University. The planning rolled along.

At the urging of the symphony's coach, John Barsness, they decided to broaden the research beyond its original survey and sent out 4,000 surveys to music educators - school-based and individual teachers - throughout the state. The survey asked the educators to poll their own students and their parents, to begin building momentum. By the end of the survey process, only 40 responses had come back. Those that did come back indicate that teachers and parents were insufficiently interested to merit even considering a statewide venture.

The finding saved the symphony what could have been serious financial and time investments and opened the door to new thinking. "It is time to look at this in a different way," reported Jackie. "We want to do this, but now we have to find a different operational and business model. We need to think about a summer festival, perhaps involving youth in chamber groups that have outreach to other communities." In the end, the Bozeman Symphony decided it couldn't complete additional planning in time to submit a prospectus for the implementation investment. But it had learned valuable information through the planning process and had strengthened its capacity in business planning.

SUNBURST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The Sunburst Community Service Foundation approached the BAP planning process with the hope of establishing a community wide approach to youth theatre. Over the years, the Sunburst Foundation had observed the strong involvement of parents in arts activities when their children became involved in those activities, and because the arts are one of three mission-based focuses of the foundation, a number of board members saw the BAP planning process as a way of building a new program that could encourage youth activity and parental involvement, both.

The group began by examining theatrical production. And, according to their coach, Linda Talbott, "The Sunburst Foundation assembled a very large and diverse committee of people who wanted to expand arts opportunities in their small and isolated community. The members were artists, dancers, puppeteers, actors, teachers, students, parents and members of the Sunburst board. The committee met every month and created a cultural vision for the community."

Through the planning process, the concept of youth theatre was replaced by youth dance. The Community Dance Studio, a local dance training program, had been in existence for ten years, and was ready for a boost in programming and community involvement. The BAP planning process made it possible for the Sunburst board and the CDS founders to begin designing a community-wide after school program. Even without going forward, the process opened new doors and brought new energy to the Dance Studio. According to Linda Talbott, "Sunburst board members told me that the planning process alone had been very valuable for the organization and the community - creating a vision and a galvanizing a group of committed individuals that were now ready to help support it's growth."

THE EMERSON CENTER FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURE

The Emerson Center for the Arts and Culture in Bozeman is really two centers. Its main building, the former Emerson Elementary School, is home to nonprofits, artist galleries and workspaces, and has multi-purpose rooms, galleries and a theatre that are used as rental facilities. Its second home is the Beall Park Arts Center, where it houses an exhibition space and educational programs, both center-based and based in the Bozeman area schools. When the Emerson came to the BAP program, it was simultaneously undergoing strategic planning. At the top of its priority list was building participation and community ownership, evident primarily through increased memberships.

Building on its already established in-school educational program, the Emerson brought together a community committee representative of its board and staff, the Bozeman School District, and downtown businesses. The Emerson had an in-school fifth grade educational program, but felt that program on its own wasn't as broad as it needed to be to attract increased members and attendees. The committee took off with dreams. "We wanted to get people bought into our plans, and we decided to really let committee members brainstorm and dream," said Karen Gaulke, development director

for the center. The committee looked at ways to build partnerships with downtown businesses, the City of Bozeman and the schools. It emerged with a plan that had fifth grade students partnering with artists and businesses to create and position works of public art throughout downtown Bozeman, each year developed around different place-based themes beginning with Yellowstone National Park (the north entrance is an hour south of town).

While the Emerson's project was not selected by the BAP panel, implementation has gone forward and - of importance to the overall center plans - the partnerships established through the planning committee work have solidified the center's role as a key player in downtown Bozeman's economic development. "We're doing our project anyway," said Gaulke. "The planning process was extremely important. We had tremendous community input, and built enormous enthusiasm. There are too many people out there now who want this to happen for us to walk away."

THE MONTANA REPERTORY THEATRE

Montana Repertory Theatre has long toured the state with one-day residencies that include school performances, workshops for students, and evening performances for the community. As it entered the BAP planning process, The Rep envisioned deepening connections to the communities it visits by expanding residencies to two days, adding a second evening performance, and building a wider network of community leaders involved in production.

The concept was sound, but for a variety of reasons the planning process didn't provide the depth of detail that the company needed to develop a precise strategy. Their general goal in entering the process was building a wide network of support with existing service, educational and social organizations in communities, using groups such as book clubs to become local booster groups. But the planning process employed by the company was more inward-focused than outward, and absent time to test the potential partnerships, the final plan of implementation was too open-ended for the panel to support.

The BAP coach for Montana Repertory Theatre, Dana Singer, explained the importance of planning. "The planning process required for the BAP prospectus application illuminated how much time and effort was truly required. MRT saw great value in the project they proposed, but thorough research was key to planning, and MRT couldn't commit the necessary resources to planning at that point in time."

Outcomes, Successes and Unanticipated Bumps in the Road

Before they entered the BAP program, each of the participant organizations had reached a plateau in building arts participation. They had tried numerous ideas out in fits and starts, and in some cases had made real efforts to launch some of the ideas they put forward in their investment applications. But none had really been able to make audience development of



Hockaday Museum of Art

this level a priority. The Alberta Bair had tried to build a Laurel audience, but lacked the resources to position a ticket outlet and consistent direct marketing program in the community. The Pondera Players had been contemplating a multi-year effort to raise funds for seating. The symphony had done outreach concerts, but hadn't been able to build a long-term "second home" visibility that included regularly bussing the entire symphony to other communities.

Working Capital Leverages Change.

Just as small businesses grow by utilizing business loans and up front capital investments, the BAP organizations each needed a dose of entirely new resources over and beyond incremental growth in their operating budgets, to pull off the plateau and move into a growth cycle that could propel them to a new level of community service and impact. In effect, the BAP program investments - of a size rarely seen in rural communities and by small-budget organizations - offered working capital that leveraged major change. In response, every participant organization has changed.

Participation can grow, even in small rural towns.

The most basic finding is no less profound for its simplicity. Small town arts organizations haven't tapped out their audiences, donors or volunteer base even though they may have been operating on a plateau or seen diminished audiences over time.

Multi-faceted assistance leads to change and has the ability to energize an organization.

It is a truism that any type of outside assistance has an impact. The BAP program offered three types of assistance: planning investments/planning opportunity, outside counsel and coaching, and significant multi-year implementation investments. The combination of focused strategy and targeted resources kicked each recipient organization into high gear.

Buy-in and community involvement come in response to concerted efforts to serve a target market.

By focusing deeply on needs and realities of a targeted community each BAP recipient has effected significant change in specific response to defined market needs. In response, the targeted communities are becoming donors, members and attendees.

As an indicator of success, contributions increase along with earned income for those organizations that primarily focused their BAP work on building earned income.

The first response to new and sustained efforts is a nod that comes, sometimes unsolicited, from contributors who write checks to demonstrate their acknowledgement and thanks to the organization. By going out of their way for participants, organizations demonstrate their commitment to the future, and consciously or subconsciously, donors respond to that commitment.

Initial success in building participation requires reaching for even higher plateaus of success - reaching for tomorrow's goals - to maintain momentum.

Organizations cannot sit back once past the first rush of success. Once there has been that sell-out performance, or that 40 percent increase in attendance, the organization has established a new level of expectations by everyone, from their board and volunteers to their audience. Sustaining and continuing to grow numbers in turn requires consistent effort: this is a long-term commitment, not a one-time project.

Resource allocation for audience development - from additional board committees to staffing and systems - is required to keep the momentum going.

To ensure continued success in building participation, organizations find they must conquer new tasks. Databases have to be created or improved to ensure on-going communication with all those newcomers. Volunteers need to help coordinate the activities of all the new volunteers and committees. Staff that has established a precedence of continuous partnership with communities must maintain that increased level of outreach and visibility.

Organizational change and a few bumps in the road are almost inevitable in response to infusions of new working capital.

This program's emphasis on learning, planning and evaluation requires that organizations be deeply invested in their ventures and not treat them as temporary projects. As a result, the work directly impacts the organizations at the board, staff and volunteer levels. New board committees - originally established as ad hoc during the planning process - become standing committees. Some board members leave, some arrive. Staff tasks are realigned and positions restructured.

Learning organizations operate differently.

Once invested in a process of reading, reflecting, conducting audience surveys and inviting community input, organizations no longer exclusively make decisions based on what the insiders around the table want.

Visibility creates more visibility, and leads to success.

Organizations that are the hot topic, that are in the news or talked about in the town's main street café, and that are catching people's attention quite simply make a splash. New participants in turn bring in other newcomers. Success leads to more success.

Footnote Detail

Footnote 5 (page 12). What to Include in the Prospectus. Applicants were asked to respond to these items:

- How did you arrive at your participation-building idea? How does it support your mission and institutional goals?
- Provide a context for why this is the best plan to reach your desired outcomes.
- What was the thought process, the institutional process, that you went through to reach your plan and goals?
- What role did each of these participants play: board, staff, volunteers, community leaders, other citizens?
- What is your participation-building program and who are your targeted participants? What participation-building strategy (broaden, deepen, diversify) is your primary focus?
- Why have you chosen a particular target group(s)?
- Thinking from your target group's perspective, what are the complementary goals of your program?
- What are the outcomes you desire? What is your institutional outcome and what is your community outcome?
- What does success look like to you?
- What will be the indicators of success?
- Who within the organization (board, staff, volunteers), and who outside the organization (community collaborators) will be integral to the success of your plan? How, specifically, will you engage them?
- Thinking from your community partners' perspective, what are the complementary goals?
- How will you create the connection, the personal interest and relevance, of your project with the targeted group of people you want to participate? How will the message be conveyed?
- What do you know of your competition and how will you cut through it?
- How do the outcomes you desire translate into results (audience, volunteers, leadership, or local revenues) within the period of the grant? How will you establish recognizable results that can be

tracked, that will translate to numbers or increased impact within the period of the grant?

- What do you think will be different within your organization and your community when this program has been completed?
- Viewing this grant as an investment, define your expected “Return On Investment” over the long-haul, beyond the grant period, into the future. Address this issue both financially and organizationally.
- How are you planning to document the impact of your program on the institution and on the community?
- What will your process be for feedback and evaluation?
- What will be the long-term impact of the project on your organization’s image and stature within the community?

Footnote 8 (page 15). Panel Members:

Bob DePratu, State Senator (R), auto sales business, Whitefish, MT

Dave Lewis, State Representative (R), prior state budget director, Helena, MT

Chas Cantlon, social service organization director serving people with disabilities through employment opportunities, Ronan, MT

Barb Andreozzi, University Extension Services representative with strong planning expertise, Anaconda, MT

Robert Booker, director of Minnesota State Arts Board, St.Paul, MN

Rick Halmes, MAC Panel Chairman, Billings, MT

Footnote 10 (page 17). Coaches/Consultants for the BAP program:

John C. Barsness, Bozeman, Montana.

Expertise in statewide arts service organizations management.

Executive Director, Montana Arts

Contract Executive Director for Montana Performing Arts Consortium, Montana Dance Arts Association, Montana Association of Symphony Orchestras

COACH: Performing Arts League, Bozeman Symphony

Jan Bastian, Miles City, Montana.

Expertise in grantsmanship for health networks, public libraries and nonprofit organizations.

Chief Executive Officer, Montana Health Network

COACH: Custer County Art and Heritage Center

Michalann (Micki) Hobson, Kure Beach, North Carolina.

Expertise in arts management/institutional development including fund raising, community relations and marketing.

Arts Management Consultant

COACH: Montana Shakespeare in the Parks

Pamela Mavrolas, Helena, Montana.

Expertise in institutional development for nonprofit organizations serving primarily environmental, sustainable agricultural, and cultural organizations.

President, Mavrolas & Associates

COACH: Hockaday Museum of Art, Glacier Orchestra and Chorale

Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer, Bozeman, Montana.

Expertise in adult learning and resource management and tribal issues.

Director, Native Waters

Principal, R.E.A.L. Experiences, Inc.

Director of Education Projects, The Watercourse and International Project WET

COACH: Alberta Bair Theater

Linda Talbott, Missoula, Montana.

Expertise in marketing, community outreach and development.

Director of Marketing and Community Outreach, KUFM-Montana PBS

COACH: Pondera Players, Sunburst Community Foundation, Emerson Center for Arts and Culture, Bigfork Community Players

Footnote 11 (page 23). THE BAP LIBRARY of Publications

Creating Public Value: *Strategic Management in Government*
Mark H. Moore
Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts 1995

The Tipping Point: *How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*
Malcolm Gladwell
Little Brown and Company
Boston, MA and New York, NY 2000

The Experience Economy: *Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*
B. Joseph Pine II and James Gilmore
Harvard Business School Press
Boston, Massachusetts 1999

Leading Teams: *Setting the Stage for Great Performances*
J. Richard Hackman
Harvard Business School Press
Boston, Massachusetts 2002

Creativity: *The Flow and Psychology of Discovery and Invention*
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
Harper Perennial
New York, New York 1996

Bowling Alone: *The Collapse and Revival of American Community*
Robert D. Putnam
Simon & Schuster
New York, New York 2000

Civic Engagement in American Democracy
Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina Editors
Brookings Institution Press
Washington, D.C. 1999

The Rise of the Creative Class: *and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*
Richard Florida
Basic Books
New York, New York 2002

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